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ICS 3125-88

5 July 1988

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MEMORANDUM FOR: Director, Intelligence Community Staff
Deputy Director, Intelligence Community Staff

FROM: Chairman, Information Handling Committee

SUBJECT: Multilateral Counterterrorist Data System (MCDS)

REFERENCE: ER 2614-88, 24 June 1988

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1. The DDCI's concern that we resolve the issue of data sharing and access prior to devoting time and resources to MCDS (reference) unfortunately places us in a Catch-22 situation. With respect to DESIST or a follow-on, that issue largely comprises:

a. a legitimate concern for security control of compartmented data, principally on the part of the DO and NSA;

b. a widespread belief within the Community, to a significant extent unjustified, that DESIST is of little use. This reflects perceptions of both technical and security limitations which restrict operational utility; and

c. a Community view that DESIST is a CIA system in which other agencies are limited subscribers and have no meaningful operational influence.

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2. It is unlikely that Community agencies will agree to specific data sharing and resource commitments until they can assure themselves that these concerns will be resolved. However, developing those assurances was the objective of the proposed IHC-sponsored system definition effort which the DDCI has apparently disapproved. As you know, we have extensively circulated in the Community the design/operations concept whereby we would seek to successfully address the security and utility issues. Response has been constructive, i.e., the concept appears to the agencies to be sufficiently viable to warrant a closer look, hence, the proposed IHC system definition effort. While the odds against ultimate success remain high, an a priori assumption that the agencies will not change their current position creates a self-fulfilling prophecy.

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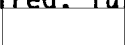
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SUBJECT: Multilateral Counterterrorist Data System (MCDS) 

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3. Three alternative courses of action suggest themselves: (1) we can revisit the matter with the DDCI and ask him to reconsider; (2) we can sponsor a meeting of senior representatives of relevant agencies to secure an agreement in principle to share data, etc., if their security and other requirements can be satisfied. We would then do the proposed system definition exercise, or a variant thereof, to develop the requested assurances; or (3) we can terminate the MCDS initiative. In the latter regard, the DDCI's active support would be required to implement MCDS, whether as an upgraded DESIST or a new system. If he is convinced that an effective system is not achievable or that an upgraded information handling capability is not required, further pursuit of the MCDS initiative would appear pointless. 

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The Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

Washington, D.C. 20505

24 June 1988

MEMORANDUM FOR: Chairman, DCI Intelligence Information
Handling Committee

SUBJECT: Multilateral Counterterrorist Data System
(MCDS)

1. I believe that it is premature to spend time and resources on MCDS until we resolve the fundamental issue of who will have access and what information will be provided. I believe the first step must be to reach agreement with the agencies that control the data, most particularly CIA and NSA, on exactly what data will be provided and the groundrules governing who will have access to it.

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2. I understand that data sharing has been a continuing problem with the existing DESIST system and has led to user complaints about the inadequacies of the system and the difficulty of using it. I suspect that neither NSA or CIA will be willing to make a substantially larger body of information available to the wide variety of agencies represented in the counterterrorism community. If that is the case, then I do not see how the present proposal is a significant advance beyond the DESIST system.

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Robert M. Gates

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